

THE CRISIS.

STATE OF THE UNION.

THE PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE.

Annual Reports of the Treasury, War, Navy, Interior and Post Office Departments.

Important Position of the President on the Crisis of the Union.

The Material and Industrial Prosperity of the Country.

Shall Such a Nation be Dissolved?

Appeal of the President to the Patriotism of the People.

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MEMORANDUM OF THE SENATE AND HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES.

Throughout the year since our last meeting the country has been eminently prosperous in all its material interests. The general health has been excellent, our harvests have been abundant, and plenty smiles throughout the land. Our commerce and manufactures have been prosecuted with energy and industry, and have yielded fair and ample returns. In short, no nation in the tide of time has ever presented a spectacle of greater material prosperity than we have done until within a very recent period.

Why is it, then, that discontent now so extensively prevails, and the Union of the States, which is the source of all these blessings, is threatened with destruction? The long continued and interminable interference of the Northern people with the question of slavery in the Southern States has at length produced its natural effects. The different sections of the Union are now arrayed against each other, and the time has arrived, so much dreaded by the Father of his Country, when hostile geographical parties have been formed. I have long foreseen and often forewarned my countrymen of the now impending danger. This does not proceed solely from the claim on the part of Congress or the Territorial Legislatures to exclude slavery from the Territories, nor from the efforts of different States to defeat the execution of the Fugitive Slave Law. All or any of these evils might have been endured by the South without danger to the Union, (as others have been,) in the hope that time and reflection might apply the remedy. The immediate peril arises not so much from these causes as from the fact that the incessant and violent agitation of the slavery question throughout the North for the last quarter of a century has at length produced its malignant influence on the slaves, and inspired them with vague notions of freedom. Hence a sense of security no longer exists around the family altar. This feeling of peace at home has given place to apprehensions of servile insurrection. Many a man throughout the South retires at night in dread of what may befall himself and his children before the morning. Should this apprehension of domestic danger, whether real or imaginary, extend and intensify until it shall pervade the masses of the Southern people, then dissolution will become inevitable. Self-preservation is the first law of nature, and has been implanted in the heart of man by his Creator for the wisest purpose; and no political union, however fraught with blessings and benefits in all other respects, can long continue, if the necessary consequence be to render the homes and the firesides of nearly half the parties to it habitually and hopelessly insecure. Sooner or later the bonds of such a Union must be severed. It is my conviction that this fatal period has not yet arrived; and my prayer to God is that He would preserve the constitution and the Union throughout all generations.

But let us take warning in time, and remove the cause of danger. It cannot be denied that, for five and twenty years, the agitation at the North against slavery in the South has been incessant. In 1835 pictorial handbills and inflammatory appeals were circulated extensively throughout the South, of a character to excite the passions of the slaves, and, in the language of General Jackson, "to stimulate them to insurrection and produce all the horrors of a servile war." This agitation has ever since been continued by the public press, by the proceedings of State and county conventions, by abolition sermons and lectures. The time of Congress has been occupied in violent speeches on this never ending subject; and appeals in pamphlet and other forms, endorsed by distinguished names, have been sent forth from this central point, and spread broadcast over the Union.

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It is said, however, that the antecedents of the President elect have been sufficient to justify the fears of the South that he will attempt to invade their constitutional rights. But are such apprehensions of contingent danger in the future sufficient to justify the immediate destruction of the noblest system of government ever devised by mortals? From the very nature of his office, and its high responsibilities, he must necessarily be conservative. The stern duty of administering the vast and complicated concerns of this government affords in itself a guarantee that he will not attempt any violation of a clear constitutional right. After all, he is no more than the chief executive officer of the government. His province is not to make, but to execute the laws; and it is a remarkable fact in our history that, notwithstanding the repeated efforts of the anti-slavery party, no single act has ever passed Congress, unless we may possibly except the Missouri Compromise, impairing in the slightest degree the rights of the South to their property in slaves. And it may also be observed, judging from present indications, that no probability exists of the passage of such an act, by a majority of both houses, either in the present or the next Congress. Surely, under these circumstances, we ought to be restrained from present action by the precept of Him who spake as never man spake, that "sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." The day of evil may never come, unless we shall rashly bring it upon ourselves.

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Only three years after my inauguration, the Supreme Court of the United States solemnly adjudged that this power did not exist in a Territorial Legislature. Yet, such has been the factious temper of the South, that this decision has been entirely disregarded, and the question has given rise to angry political conflicts throughout the country. Those who have appealed to the Supreme Court, and who have constituted a tribunal to pass upon the question, have been treated with contumacious disregard. It is not necessary to repeat the facts of this case, but it is sufficient to say that the Supreme Court has decided against the South, and that the South has refused to obey the decision. This is a clear violation of the constitution, and it is the duty of every citizen to resist such a violation.

The most palpable violations of constitutional duty which have yet been committed consist in the acts of different State Legislatures to defeat the execution of the Fugitive Slave Law. It ought to be remembered, however, that for these acts neither Congress nor any President can justly be held responsible. Having been passed in violation of the federal constitution, they are, therefore, null and void. But the question has arisen, have from the beginning declared the Fugitive Slave Law to be unconstitutional. The single exception is that of a State, which, in defiance of the Supreme Court, has reversed by the proper appellate tribunal, but has met with such universal reprobation that there can be no danger from it as a precedent. The validity of this law has been established over and over again by the Supreme Court of the United States with perfect unanimity. It is founded upon an express provision of the constitution, requiring that fugitive slaves who escape from one State to another shall be delivered up to their masters. Without this provision it is a well known historical fact that the constitution itself could never have been adopted.

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The most palpable violations of constitutional duty which have yet been committed consist in the acts of different State Legislatures to defeat the execution of the Fugitive Slave Law. It ought to be remembered, however, that for these acts neither Congress nor any President can justly be held responsible. Having been passed in violation of the federal constitution, they are, therefore, null and void. But the question has arisen, have from the beginning declared the Fugitive Slave Law to be unconstitutional. The single exception is that of a State, which, in defiance of the Supreme Court, has reversed by the proper appellate tribunal, but has met with such universal reprobation that there can be no danger from it as a precedent. The validity of this law has been established over and over again by the Supreme Court of the United States with perfect unanimity. It is founded upon an express provision of the constitution, requiring that fugitive slaves who escape from one State to another shall be delivered up to their masters. Without this provision it is a well known historical fact that the constitution itself could never have been adopted.

Let us take warning in time, and remove the cause of danger. It cannot be denied that, for five and twenty years, the agitation at the North against slavery in the South has been incessant. In 1835 pictorial handbills and inflammatory appeals were circulated extensively throughout the South, of a character to excite the passions of the slaves, and, in the language of General Jackson, "to stimulate them to insurrection and produce all the horrors of a servile war." This agitation has ever since been continued by the public press, by the proceedings of State and county conventions, by abolition sermons and lectures. The time of Congress has been occupied in violent speeches on this never ending subject; and appeals in pamphlet and other forms, endorsed by distinguished names, have been sent forth from this central point, and spread broadcast over the Union.

How easy would it be for the American people to settle the slavery question forever, and to restore peace and harmony to this distracted country! They, and they alone, can do it. All that is necessary to accomplish the object, and all for which the slave States have ever contended, is to be let alone, and permitted to manage their domestic institutions in their own way. As sovereign States, they, and they alone, are responsible before God and the world for the slavery existing among them. For this the people of the North are not more responsible, and have no more right to interfere, than with similar institutions in Russia or in Brazil. Upon their good sense and patriotic forbearance I confess I still greatly rely. Without their aid, it is beyond the power of any President, no matter what may be his own political proclivities, to restore peace and harmony among the States. Wisely limited and restrained as is his power, under our constitution and laws, he alone can accomplish but little, for good or for evil, on such a momentous question.

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This and this brings me to observe that the election of any one of our fellow citizens to the office of President does not of itself afford just cause for dissolving the Union. This is more especially true if his election has been effected by a mere plurality, and not a majority, of the people, and has resulted from transient and temporary causes, which may probably never again occur. In order to justify a resort to revolutionary resistance, the federal gov-